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Testimony of
David Scata, Past President of ConnCASE
Education Committee
3/16/2009
House Bill No. 6656
AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee; my name is David Scata, Past President of ConnCASE. ConnCASE represents over two hundred public school administrators of special education in the state of Connecticut.

I would first like to extend my appreciation to the committee to hear the opinion and concerns in the past few years on a variety of issues related to special education.

I am here today to give testimony on Raised House Bill 6656

The intent of the bill would provide a process in the next eight years to make changes to the reimbursement formula to towns in the excess cost grant. It would establish a three-tiered reimbursement formula beginning in FY09-11 that would provide a gradual increase over time to provide additional funding to towns in the excess cost grant and offset the rising cost of special education.

Based on Governor's Rell's proposed budget, the excess cost grant will be capped at 90% for the next two years. Though towns and cities will incur a reduction of state grants, the cost of special education continues to rise. Every year, both at the local level and out of districts placements cost have raised an average of 5%-6% per year. Special education spending accounts for 14% of all education spending in Connecticut and costs keep growing faster than other school spending (5%-6% vs. 3%-4%).

The increasing budgetary demands for special education services often results in local budgets having to reallocate financial resources from general education. This is particularly true in smaller towns where the arrival of a single new high-cost special education student during the school year can create a budget crisis. Raised Bill 6656 with a Tier approach beyond the 4.5 would help towns to offset those cost.

The present formula for the Excess Cost Grant (Student Based) provides a threshold of 4.5 times per pupil cost (PPC) before the excess cost grant can be accessed. This threshold varies from town to town and can vary between \$40,000 and \$70,000, before excess cost can be realized.

The proposal to provide a tiered approach will help to offset the rising cost of special education yet mindful of the present budget crisis. The gradual increase in the next eight years would help offset the burden to the state as well. As the representative of ConnCASE, I can attest that state wide this raised bill is supported by not only the Directors of Special Education but by the Superintendents as well. Please pass raised bill 6656 and provide the towns and cities the needed funds to stem the tide of the financial burden of special education.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify.